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ABSTRACT

Sixty-nine American Library Association (ALA) accredited graduate library school programs were surveyed to determine available library education opportunities in bibliotherapy. The survey revealed that only one school, Catholic University of America, offered a formal bibliotherapy course. Eight institutions indicated that bibliotherapy was handled as a unit within a broader course, six noted that students may elect to pursue bibliotherapy through independent study or special projects, and three reported offering short courses or workshops involving bibliotherapy. Five references are listed. (FM)

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"Medicine For The Soul"

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> "You think your pain and your heartache are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me the most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive."[1]

Voilà bibliotherapy! Although probably not James Baldwin's intent, he successfully described the less clinical aspect of a valuable technique in library service. Webster's Third New International Dictionary further clarifies with a contemporary definition: "guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading."[2] Pierre Janet, French psychologist and physician employed therapeutic reading over a half century ago, believing that some of his patients could be stimulated into better life adjustments through reading assignments. Far preceeding Janet, the Greeks implied understanding and appreciation of bibliotherapy in their inscription on the ancient libraries of Thebes: "Medicine For The Soul." And under more contemporary circumstances, bibliotherapy has met success in counteracting drug addiction, social maladjustments, juvenile delinquency, mental illness. Modern physicians and educators as well as librarians view the library as an agency serving both the mind and the spirit, echoing the Thebes inscription.

But why limit bibliotherapy to a clinical type setting or application? Preventive bibliotherapy is a daily possibility in any library. Literature may offer the young reader an opportunity for identification with a model hero or heroine - it could provide the reader of any age with the guidance to pattern oneself after a person who has dealt with reality effectively. Perhaps an overworked cliché, but it really is "the right book for the right person at the right time," with some reservations, of course.

Instantaneous preventive bibliotherapy? Not quite - understanding of the principles involved is mandatory. In the October 1962 issue of Library Trends, Margaret M. Kinney, Chief Librarian of the VA Hospital, Bronx, New York outlined basic characteristics.

> "To become a bibliotherapist, an individual needs the personal qualifications, the emotional stability, the physical well-being, the character, and the personality necessary for him to work successfully with people. This work includes supervision and instruction of other personnel and co-workers, as well as a thorough understanding of the community. The demands of his work require a willingness to recognize the misfortunes of others and to react with sufficient facility to be of help. In addition, such a specialist has to understand the goal desired in each instance, be willing to accept responsibility for action taken, and be able to assume authority whenever necessary. Furthermore, it is necessary for the therapist to recognize and control personal prejudices, to be receptive to new learning, and to direct and channel personal feelings in a manner that would not impair his helpfulness to others. As a bibliotherapist such a person needs to assume responsibility for the selection of reading materials; his selections would be based upon the understanding of cause and effect as they relate to the physical, emotional, and cultural factors related to the reader. An understanding of and a feeling for what goes on when one person talks and another listens are of primary importance to anyone undertaking this aspect of librarianship. A thorough knowledge of disturbances in communication, whether distortions in perception (listening) or in transmission (speaking), and an ability to communicate with and feel a real interest in the other individual are of great value."[3]

But the skilled librarian who possesses common sense, empathy and a sense of responsibility is well on the way to becoming a successful bibliotherapist. Obviously everyone, child or adult, faces varied problems which might be more readily understood and solved with appropriate reading guidance. Mental hygiene and literature are cousins of the first degree. This kinship, however, does not guarantee compatibility. Bibliotherapy may not always be the most appropriate form of guidance; and even if deemed the most suitable, success is never insured. But the odds would become more favorable with wider availability of formal instruction in bibliotherapeutic techniques.

As so aptly stated by Professor Margaret E. Monroe, Library School, University of Wisconsin-Madison,

> "Library education bears the prime responsiblity for the education of librarians in those things which are librarianship. To the extent that bibliotherapeutic services are an aspect of librarianship, library education has a responsibility to prepare librarians for this function."[4]

And just what is the status of preparation?

This librarian conducted a survey of all ALA accredited graduate library school programs (Oct. 1980 listing) to determine available library education opportunities in bibliotherapy. All sixty-nine schools responded with either/both summary letter or catalog of course descriptions. Only one formal course (Bibliotherapy 855: Catholic University of America) is in evidence for all sixty-seven schools. Indications that bibliotherapy is handled as a unit within a broader course were received from eight institutions. Six noted that students may elect to pursue bibliotherapy through independent study or a special project. And three schools provide siminar - workshop - short course opportunities. Geographically, five schools in the midwest, four in the west, three in the northeast, three in the southeast and two in Canada follow above stated methods. And obviously, some have attracted much interest and found success. In June of 1978, the University of Wisconsin-Madison conducted a three-day Seminar on Bibliotherapy from which Proceedings are now available through its Library School. The University of Denver offered a two-quarter-hour short course, "Bibliotherapy," November 27 - December 1, 1978 with the goal of acquainting participants with the processes of bibliotherapy and its many uses in public, school and institutional libraries. And during the Summer of 1978, Kent State University offered a bibliotherapy workshop directed by Ms. Rhea Rubin, author of Using Bibliotherapy: A Guide to Theory and Practice (Oryx Press, 1978) and Bibliotherapy Sourcebook (Oryx Press, 1978). Catholic University

of America lists the following description for its Bibliotherapy 855: "An introductory course in bibliotherapy which is defined as the interation between the individual, the literary materials and/or creative writing, and the facilitator which brings about self-understanding, growth or healing. Each class is two-fold: (1) readings are assigned to be discussed in class or analyzed in written papers, (2) the class will become a bibliotherapy group. Members will be given opportunities to observe, participate in, to facilitate, and to critique the class bibliotherapy sessions."

Although not yet a basic or required course in library schools, bibliotherapy has been given a great deal of attention in at least twenty-five percent of those with ALA accreditation status. And the provision of workshop, short course type programs would indicate an interest on the part of practicing librarians who through experience readily perceive its capabilities. In due time, the study of bibliotherapy may become a direct as well as indirect aspect of all library school curricula. Hopefully, an overdue notice will not be issued for

> "bibliotherapy offers the best of other men's thoughts and experiences to the receptive individual who is reaching out for the comfort and stimulation which reading can give. It is a dynamic and challenging profession, worthy of the best librarianship has to offer."[5]

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